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Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

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The Michigan Passenger

Your source for passenger rail news since 1973

Record revenue and ridership

By Larry Sobczak
Michigan Passenger Editor

Amtrak trains in Michigan and nationwide have set new ridership records for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30.

Amtrak's system-wide ridership during the budget year was 30.2 million passengers, up 5 percent over the previous year. Ticket revenue was up by more than 8 percent despite significant weather-related disruptions in much of the country.

Ridership and revenue figures are the highest in the nation's passenger rail service's 40-year history and

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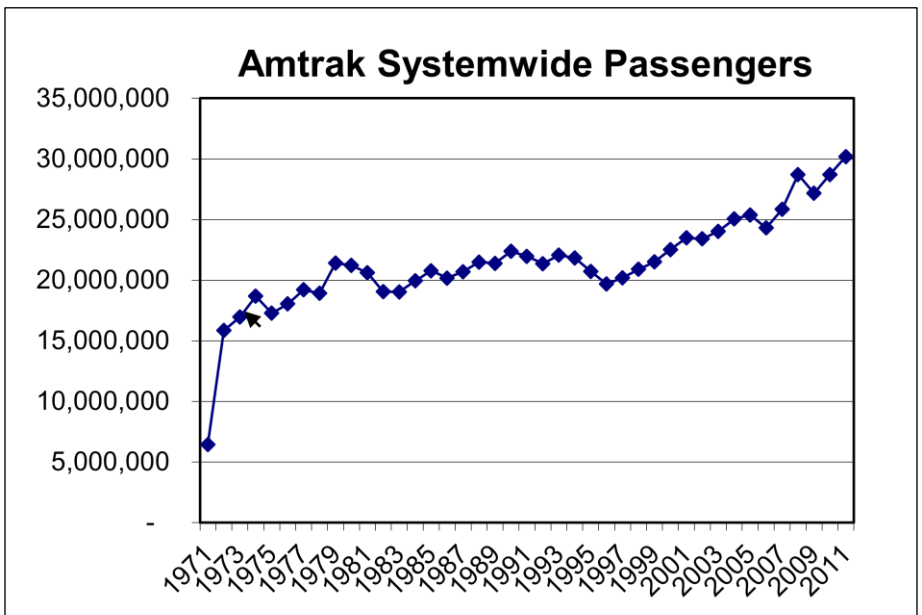

(Graphic by John DeLora)

Train station upgrades underway

By Larry Sobczak
Michigan Passenger Editor

An unprecedented $71.5 million of investment is pouring into seven Michigan passenger train stations over the next couple of years.

Here's breakdown by community:

- Ann Arbor -- $25 million;
- Battle Creek -- $3.8 million;
- Dearborn -- $28 million;
- Durand -- $285,000;
- Grand Rapids -- $4.6 million;
- Pontiac -- $1.4 million;
- Troy -- $8.5 million.

The largest project is a $28 million multimodal station proposed for Dearborn and the smallest is a $285,000 paving of the parking lot in Durand.

Many of the stations integrate local transit services such as buses and taxis into their designs.

Each of the projects is at different stage of completion ranging the full spectrum from the initial design phase in Dearborn and Ann Arbor to a grand opening ceremony in August in Pontiac.

Most of the costs have been covered by state and federal grants with the exception of Ann Arbor which appears will share costs between grants, the city and the University of Michigan.

The investments mean hundreds of construction jobs during one of the deepest building recessions in 30 years as well as a commitment to communities which should last the lifetime of the stations.

The Michigan Passenger has compiled stories about each of the stations inside this issue.

(Turn to pages 4 & 5 for more.)

Amtrak's Wolverine train rolls past the Battle Creek station in September where $3.8 million in renovations are underway. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

Feds loosen funding rules for M-1 Light Rail

President Barrack Obama signed a new federal law on Nov. 20 that could free up to $300 million in federal grant money for the M-1 Woodward Avenue Light Rail project in Detroit.

A provision was inserted by Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) into the budget bill signed by the President that keeps the requirement that at least 40 percent of the funding from Federal Transit Administration's discretionary New Starts program is matched by local government dollars. Project organizers said a proposed 50 percent match requirement could have threatened the project.

It has been estimated that the $550 million M-1 project will need more than $300 million in federal assistance.

"Detroit deserves a world-class transportation system, including light rail service along the iconic and much-used Woodward corridor," Levin said. "This legislation helps ensure that Detroit residents and visitors will enjoy a full range of transportation options."

Levin's office said the legislation will allow Detroit to use local sources of funding – particularly private funds pledged by the M-1 Rail group of investors, which includes the Kresge Foundation and corporate titans Roger Penske, Dan Gilbert, Peter Karmanos and Mike Ilitch – as a match for federal funding. Given the city's financial condition, Detroit wouldn't be able to come up with the required 40% match without counting the private funding.

Detroit already was awarded $25 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation for the project, which would create a 9-mile light rail route with 19 stop from the Rosa Parks

(Please see FUNDING, page 8)

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The Michigan Passenger welcomes submissions on passenger rail issues for publications. Material sent for publication should be sent o our Editor at: larrysobczak@hotmail.com

Clippings from newspapers and magazines must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent in by e-mail should be in JPEG format. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

To subscribe to this publication, join MARP by filling out the application below. All MARP members receive a copy of this publication sent to their home or business.

About MARP…

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) was established in 1973 as a consumer advocacy group to improve intercity rail and bus service, improve local transit and encourage the preservation of historic railroad stations.

MARP is not affiliated with Amtrak, the railroads, governments or any political party. MARP is incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization and is exempt from federal income tax under the IRS code, 501©(3) as a charitable educational organization. Dues and donations to MARP may be tax-deductible in accordance with the IRS code.

MARP is an all-volunteer organization. Its membership consists of passengers and citizens who want a viable, balanced transportation system in Michigan. We can all use the help we can get!

MARP members pose next to the famous Pere Marquette 1225 locomotive which was used as model for the Disney movie "The Polar Express." MARP was given a tour of the Steam Railroading Institute after a monthly meeting in Owosso. MARP member meeting are held at interesting locations throughout the state in an effort to give everyone a chance to participate.

Membership Application

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Summit highlights future of rail transportation

By Kay Chase and John DeLora

Improving passenger and freight rail service in Michigan appears to be an idea whose time has come.

Addressing more than 200 business leaders, lawmakers, advocates and industry representatives in Lansing on Oct. 31, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder reiterated themes of a major address given the week before the summit.

"We need a modern transportation system that moves people and goods safely, reliably and efficiently in order to increase productivity and our quality of life. We need a multi-modal system that will serve the movements of a new, more urban, more tech-savvy and more active generation," he said.

Snyder stressed that increasing speeds on the Chicago-Detroit route was his top priority and that current work should be completed in two to three years.

He urged attendees to "Spread the word - don't be quiet!" and called for "relentless, positive action" in pursuit of a transportation system that is sustainable and gives a return on investment. This upbeat message was echoed by speakers throughout the day.

John Porcari, U.S. Department of Transporation Deputy Undersecretary, emphasized the administration's commitment to smart investments in passenger rail that will create jobs today and lay the groundwork for long-term economic growth.

He made a strong case for the American Jobs Act (S. 1549 introduced in the U.S. Senate in September) which would include $4 billion to improve existing intercity passenger rail and develop high-speed rail corridors, $2 billion for Amtrak capital projects and $5 billion for a competitive grant program similar to the existing Transportation Investment Generating Economy Recovery (TIGER) program.

Recalling the incremental development of the nation's interstate highway system over more than half a century, Porcari urged a similar visionary leap to create a strong, nationwide rail system for which future generations will thank us.

Kirk Steudle, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) director, spoke of the importance of the recent state acquisition of the Norfolk Southern trackage. With most of the corridor between Dearborn and the Indiana border under state control, Michigan can proceed with upgrades to signals and track to allow speeds of 110 mph, thus increasing reliability and cutting travel times.

"There is plenty of capacity on the line for freight and passenger rail to coexist peaceably," Steudle said.

Former Congressman Joe Schwarz also spoke of the Norfolk Southern Railway negotiations which he characterized as "disparate interests with a common distant goal." Both Schwarz and Steudle praised the dedication of MDOT senior staff members Tim Hoeffner,

Al Johnson and Therese Cody in working through the lengthy and difficult process to reach agreement with Norfolk Southern and in working with federal officials and the state legislature to secure the funding to ensure development of the corridor. Schwarz noted that Norfolk Southern, too, will benefit from the new arrangement and will likely regain some lost business.

Steudle added that Positive Train Control is an issue which must be addressed now.

"We need to have a common national system so that we do not end up with dozens of different systems," he said.

Steudle reminded the audience that the prosperity of the last half of the 20th century was a result of the foresight of our grandparents. Now in the 21st century, a renewed investment in infrastructure is vital to continued growth and competitiveness in the global economy.

Speaking later in the day, John Robert Smith, Mayor of Meridian Mississippi, echoed this sentiment.

"We build today not for our grandson, but for our grandson's grandson," he said.

Robert Chaprnka, President of the Michigan Railroads Association, spoke of two projects that will have significance for freight rail in Michigan.

The Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal recently received necessary approvals from the Federal Highway Administration. Plans for a new railroad tunnel under the Detroit River are being advanced by the Continental Rail Gateway consortium (Windsor Port Authority, Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd. and Borealis Infrastructure Management Inc.).

Chaprnka said that while the freight railroads build and maintain their own infrastructure, they could use help with maintaining grade crossings. He mentioned SB 544, introduced in the state legislature by Senator John Moolenaar (R-Midland).

State Representative Wayne Schmidt (R-Traverse City) foresees expansion of freight rail business to haul lumber, cherries, processed foods, and manufactured goods. He is thankful that rail has not been ripped out from the Upper Peninsula, given the resurgence of mining activity.

Attendees fill the conference room at the Lansing Center for the Michigan Rail Summit held Oct. 31. (Photo by John DeLora.)

Mayor Smith gave an excellent presentation showing how a modern intermodal terminal has transformed the character of the main business district in his city. Since the station's redevelopment, new businesses have come into the downtown area, and city property tax revenues have gone up sharply.

During the day, questions from the audience reflected many of the same ideas and concerns that MARP heard during the series of Michigan by Rail Forums held around the state last fall:

- **Connect Michigan trains to Toronto and to the east coast through Ontario.** Gov. Snyder said he is working with the government of Ontario on border crossing issues and spoke about a St. Louis-Chicago-Detroit-Montreal corridor.
- **Funding.** State Senator John Proos (R-St. Joseph) acknowledged the gap between needs and resources and said that his colleagues need to be convinced of the value of infrastructure investments.
- **The Detroit-Ann Arbor and WALLY commuter trains and airport connections.** The Governor says the acquisition and upgrade of the Dearborn to Kalamazoo segment must be completed first. Source of operating funds is problematic. Dearborn Mayor John O'Reilly sees an airport shuttle from Henry Ruff Road.
- **Connecting passenger trains to local transit.** Governor Snyder, citing his commuting experience in Chicago, acknowledges this need, as well as the need for good bicycle and pedestrian access - it's good for your health.
- **Expansion of passenger train routes in Michigan.** Gov. Snyder said he "is happy to look at" a train to Traverse City or a Lansing to Detroit route, but the first priority is to complete the Detroit-Chicago corridor. Senator Proos pointed out that southwest Michigan is one hour from Chicago's Loop – while cost/benefit analysis is needed, "we're darn close to a commuter line."
- **PRIAA section 209.** Steudle said MDOT is "trying to drive the number down" while projecting that revenues will cover costs by 2012-22.

Partnering with the Michigan Environmental Council to present the conference were the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Railroads Association and The Right Place, a west Michigan economic development group.

MARP was well represented by several members including Robert Tischbein, Hugh Gurney, John Langdon, Jim Hinkins, Reynolds Farley, Kay Chase, John DeLora, Clark Charnetski, Steve Sobel, Ron Leatz, Doug Wilson, and Larry Krieg.

Check www.marp.org for the latest status of Amtrak trains.

SPECIAL REPORT: $71.5 million investment in train stations

Pontiac Transportation Center opened on Aug. 8

The new intermodal station in Pontiac opened Aug. 8 to serve Greyhound and Amtrak passengers.

It is a hub for mass transit, including six daily Amtrak Wolverine Service trains to and from Detroit and Chicago. The local transit provider, SMART, stops just outside the station.

"Your trip starts here," said State Transportation Director Kirk T. Steudle. "This station is an excellent example of why it's important for the State of Michigan to invest in safe, modern, accessible transit buildings. This is an investment in the city of Pontiac and an investment in public transportation."

Located at 51000 Woodward Ave., the new 4,500-square-foot station has a passenger lobby, bathrooms, seating and canopies at the bus loading area and the train platform. There is passenger parking and security lighting. There are facilities for Amtrak which acts as a terminal for crews starting or ending their shifts.

The new station cost $1.4 million and it was funded through state and federal grants.

"Investments like this help the State of Michigan provide efficient and effective public transportation, and provide the connections between modes that travelers need to make it a relevant travel option," said Amtrak Board Chairman Tom Carper, who also attended last year's groundbreaking at the new station.

In fiscal year 2010, nearly 16,000 people got on or off the train in Pontiac, a 10 percent increase in travel over the previous year. Since June of fiscal year 2011, more than 12,000 passengers have taken Amtrak, putting the station on pace to exceed the previous year's trips.

Dignitaries cut a ribbon to mark the opening of the Pontiac Transportation on Aug. 8. The facility serves Amtrak and Greyhound passengers. (MDOT photo)

The Pontiac station also is home to Greyhound, with two buses daily and up to eight buses on the weekends. A Greyhound ticket agent will be available 10 to 12 hours a day on weekdays to assist passengers.

There is no ticket agent for Amtrak passengers.

Grand Rapids station to be finished by Sept. 2013

A groundbreaking ceremony was held in October for a new $4.6 million station in Grand Rapids. Construction is expected to be completed by September 2013.

The project is funded through a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration. Last year, the DDA approved an $850,000 request to help the Rapid and M-DOT buy the land and leverage the federal earmark.

The new Amtrak Passenger Station, and accompanying track improvements, are being built next to the Rapid Central Bus Station off Grandville Avenue. The site is south of The Rapid Central Station and the Wealthy Street overpass. The project includes a new hub and new spur rail from the existing CSX mainline near the corner of Buchanan Avenue and Pleasant Street. The new track would extend north towards The Rapid Central Station, making it one stop shopping for travelers.

The existing station at Wealthy Street and Market is outdated and small with limited parking. The new station would be a modern facility with two engines and on-site storage and maintenance equipment. No more turning around or moving the trains for overnight parking on Ann Street.

The costly part is the relocation of the train tracks. That funding was secured through a federal railroad grant for $3.8 million.

Project leaders expect actual construction to begin in April.

Grand Rapids officials break ground on the new $4.6 million Amtrak station. (Photo by John Langdon)

The station will be named for Vern Ehlers, who represented Michigan's 3rd District until early this year. He said it was "a great honor" to have the station bear his name. Ironically, Ehlers voted against the original funding for the station project.

$3.8 million Battle Creek improvements moving along

Work is progressing on the $3.8 million renovation of the Battle Creek Amtrak station.

The parking lot next to the station at the former site of the city bus transfer terminals will open in November. The lot will offer parking for downtown visitors, Full Blast and employees of Amtrak and bus services.

The project was announced in January 2010 as part of $40 million in federal economic stimulus money awarded to Michigan to improve the rail corridor linking Detroit and Chicago. Stations in Dearborn and Troy also are getting upgrades.

Here is the Battle Creek Station in September. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

The city is using another stimulus award to relocate the bus transfer center from next to the train station to across McCamly Street at a cost of $230,262.

The Battle Creek station plans also call for a more secure long-term parking area that passengers would continue to access from Capital Avenue.

City officials said vehicle break-ins had discouraged people from using the long-term parking, but a new fence and video monitoring system should make people more comfortable about leaving their cars at the station overnight. Additional lighting also will help security and make the station more visible, he said.

All station operations have been relocated to a temporary facility located about 300 feet west of the current station across McCamly St.

Contract means work could begin soon on Troy station

By Larry Sobczak
Michigan Passenger Editor

The city of Troy and the Michigan Department of Transportation have entered into a contract to construct a new $8.5 million train station near Maple and Coolidge Roads.

The Troy City Council approved the contract in September for the 3,000-square-foot Troy Multimodal Transit Center which will serve Amtrak trains as well as buses and taxis.

The contract will allow MDOT and the city to finalize station designs and negotiate leases with Amtrak and the host railroad, Canadian National. Construction is expected to be completed by September 2013.

Design and construction of the station will be paid through a Federal Railroad Administration grant. Yearly maintenance costs are expected to be approximately $30,000 with the city recouping those costs through leases with Amtrak, transit services and taxi companies.

The new station will be located on the east side of the Canadian National Railroad tracks, across from the current Plexiglas bus shelter (Birmingham station) where approximately 20,000 passengers board Amtrak's Wolverine service between Pontiac and Chicago each year. City officials project more than 57,000 passengers will board trains yearly at the new station by 2027.

The new station's passenger loading platform will remain on the west side of the tracks and will be connected by a bridge over the tracks with elevators and stairs leading down to ground level.

The decision to locate the platform on the west side of the tracks is because neither Canadian National, Amtrak or the city of Troy could guarantee the tracks on the east side would be in place for the next 20 years which was a condition of the federal grant. Canadian National has expressed interest in removing the east side tracks due to low freight traffic, poor track conditions and high cost of maintaining switches.

The construction contract for the Troy station marks the end of 10 years of problems.

The station owes its location to a 2000 consent agreement between the city of Troy and developer Grand Sakwa. The developer gave the 3.5 acre site to the city as a concession in the development of the 77 acre mixed-use development known as Midtown.

Grand Sawka sued the city earlier this year, citing a reversionary clause in the consent agreement that would return the station's land parcel back to the developer if no station was built or funded within 10 years. The Oakland Circuit Court decided against Grand Sakwa in June.

In April, the city of Birmingham had backed out its partnership with Troy over the construction of the station when negotiations with a property owner on the west side of the tracks would have cost the city more than $500,000 than budgeted. City officials were confident they could have acquired the parcel through eminent domain but at no cost savings to the city after legal fees.

City officials have publicly expressed future interest in the station if an opportunity arises.

Durand paves station parking lot

By Larry Sobczak
Michigan Passenger Editor

Supporters of the historic Durand Union Station can scratch another item off their "to do" list.

"We have good news at the station," said long-time MARP member and Durand Union Station supporter Norma Ward. "The parking lot is finally going to be paved."

The Durand city council approved matching funds to a state grant in September and work began in October.

The project includes a parking lot with more than 100 spaces; "rain garden" storm water detention pond; landscaping; and concrete sidewalk and curbs. Most of the costs will be covered by a $250,000 Michigan Department of Transportation grant, City Manager Amy Roddy said.

The old lot was gravel and had no drainage system. A portion of the parking lot once had railroad tracks running through it.

The construction contract was awarded to E.T. MacKenzie, a construction company in Grand Ledge, in an amount not to exceed $285,000.

Originally the city considered a three-phase $500,000 plan that included new lighting for the parking lot, but decided it could not fit it in its budget at this time.

Work is expected to be completed by the end of the 2011 construction season.

Workers excavate the new drainage system at Durand Union Station. (Photo by John DeLora.)

Durand Union Station is served by one westbound and eastbound Blue Water train each day.

The station, which was once a major passenger transfer point between five railroads, was saved from the wrecking ball in the early 1970s. It now serves as a museum, railroad library and meeting place as well as an Amtrak station.

Ann Arbor's station receives the first piece of funding

The Federal Railroad Administration has released $2.8 million to help build a high-speed rail station in Ann Arbor.

The funding, announced in August by U.S. Rep. John Dingell, will allow the city of Ann Arbor to begin the preliminary engineering, design and environmental documentation required to construct a new intercity and high-speed rail station, referred to as the Fuller Road Station.

"Construction of a new station is critical to Ann Arbor and will be a key tool in recruiting and retaining the vibrant small-business community that already resides in Ann Arbor," Diane Keller, A2Y chamber president and CEO, said in a statement. "It will also create critical construction jobs in our community."

The original award, announced in May, funds the project, which would serve the Chicago-to-Detroit high-speed rail line. The total cost of the rail station and platform is estimated at $25 million and would incorporate automobile, pedestrian and bus access.

"This funding will play a critical role in expanding transportation options for Ann Arbor by helping to build a new bus and train station," Dingell said in a statement.

The old Ann Arbor station is the busiest Amtrak station in Michigan. But it is on single-track territory without passing sidings, which forces intercity trains to stop and block the main line while serving the station. The project includes construction of passing track that would allow passenger trains to meet and for more than one train to serve the station at a time. The station is planned for what is now a parking lot on the south side of Fuller Road, just east of East Medical Center Drive and Maiden Lane in Ann Arbor.

The commuter rail plan would support four round trips with station stops in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Ypsilanti, Wayne/Westland and Detroit's New Center area.

Source: Crain's Detroit Business

Dearborn gets $28.2 million for new station

The Michigan Department of Transportation has received $28.2 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation to consolidate Dearborn's two passenger rail facilities into a pedestrian-friendly, intermodal station in the West Downtown section of the city.

The money will support President Obama's vision to create livable cities and improve passenger rail service.

The new station will serve local residents and students at University of Michigan–Dearborn and Henry Ford Community College. It will also accommodate tourists via a new pedestrian overpass at the Henry Ford Museum/Greenfield Village, Dearborn's largest tourist attraction with 1.7 million visitors every year.

The intermodal facility will be designed for the planned Ann Arbor–Detroit commuter rail as well as future high-speed intercity passenger rail service. It will also accommodate city, regional and intercity bus systems; local and tourist shuttles; bicycle and greenway linkages; and, auto, taxi, and limousine connections to Detroit International Airport.

MARP honors Dr. Schwarz at annual meeting

By Larry Sobczak
Michigan Passenger Editor

Former U.S. Congressman Dr. John J.H. "Joe" Schwarz was honored at the 38th Annual MARP Meeting in Battle Creek on Sept. 10.

The "Michigan Leadership Award" was presented to Dr. Schwarz by Robert Tischbein, MARP chair at Clara's On the River, the former Battle Creek station that has been restored into a restaurant.

"I am a very, very committed supporter of passenger rail. I'm honored," Dr. Schwarz said.

He said that he was pleased to be honored at the former station, noting that some of his earliest memories were boarding trains there.

"This station has meant so much to me. I was delighted that it became a restaurant after sitting empty for a few years," Dr. Schwarz said.

The station lost its rail connection in the 1970s when the rail lines through Battle Creek were consolidated to help ease traffic congestion.

A lifelong train enthusiast, Schwarz has played important roles as a state legislator, a Congressman, and a private citizen. Schwarz has long recognized modern and efficient train service as an economic development tool and a provider of jobs. He has advocated for trains as a vital component of a safe, convenient and energy efficient transportation system that provides access to business, tourism, and educational venues for travelers of all ages and income levels.

Schwarz was recently appointed by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder to represent the public on the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission. His keynote address to MARP detailed the initiatives of this eleven-state compact to promote, coordinate and support improvements to passenger rail service throughout the region.

"I would like to see four hour (travel time) between Detroit and Chicago. It's doable," Dr. Schwarz said. "We have a chance in the Midwest to prove how good we are."

Other speakers at the meeting included Tim Hoeffner, Administrator of the M-DOT Office of High Speed Rail.

Hoeffner gave MARP members an update on the state's efforts to purchase the Norfolk Southern Railroad between Dearborn and Kalamazoo.

MARP Chairman Robert Tischbein, left, presents a plaque to former Congressman Dr. Joe Schwarz at the 38th Annual MARP Meeting in Battle Creek. Dr. Schwarz has been a longtime passenger rail advocate. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

MARP member Larry Krieg showed a video of the track improvements that were underway along that same stretch of railroad as well as an informative narrative of how the work is performed.

Battle Creek Mayor Susan Baldwin told the audience how important the railroads are to continued development of the city.

Rick Harnish gave a presentation about successes the Midwest High Speed Rail Association has made in Illinois and how those successes can be parlayed in Michigan.

Super meetings in super places

By Hugh Gurney
MARP Secretary

Starting in 2011, the Executive Committee meets one hour ahead of the monthly meeting to review finances and other routine business. All members are welcome to attend these sessions, but can take a pass on them if they wish.

We are making a real effort to meet at train stations and learn more about the history of railroading in that community as well as line up interesting speakers on contemporary issues. In January, the Williamston Depot Museum welcomed us to their Pere Marquette Depot and told us how the building had been saved. MDOT's Tim Hoeffner noted that the reappointment of Kirk Stuedle by the new governor was a good omen for supporters of passenger rail

In February, we met at the Durand Union Station. Bob Cosgrove told us about the construction of the original Detroit River Railroad Tunnel in the early 1900's and plans for a new tunnel to replace it.

March found us at the historic 1929 Amtrak Station in Bangor, where owner Ken Ratzlaff gave a lively presentation with maps and visuals on railroad development in western Michigan.

The Lansing Model Railroad Club welcomed us in April to their home, the former Grand Trunk depot in Millett. We saw their extensive model train layout and learned from Club President Michael Frezell how his group is preserving and using that circa 1900 structure.

MARP members meet at the Historic State Theatre in Jackson on Oct. 8.. The art deco theater is located downtown and one of the gems of a bygone era. It's one of the many interesting places MARP has met. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

In June, we visited the beautifully maintained Witch's Hat Depot in South Lyon. Jennifer Redfern of the South Lyon Area Historical Society gave us a tour. Eli Cooper briefed us on plans for the new transportation center in Ann Arbor.

Dowagiac station host Ron Leatz welcomed us in July to that town's Amtrak Station and briefed us on the history of that lovingly preserved structure. Certificates were given to the Town & Country Garden Club for their care of the station's surroundings and the Dowagiac High School Fine Arts Booster Club for washing all 105 windows in the building and cleaning grime stained woodwork.

The former Michigan Central depot in Battle Creek, now Clara's On the River, was the site of our Annual Meeting in September. Mayor Susan Baldwin offered an interesting overview of Battle Creek history, MDOT's Tim Hoeffner briefed us current and upcoming rail projects in Michigan, and Rick Harnish and Madeline Grennan brought us up to date on the work of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association. Battle Creek native Joe Schwartz was given MARP's Leadership Award for his longstanding support of passenger rail while a Michigan State Senator and U. S. Representative, and now the Governor's Appointee to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.

October and November meetings were held in Jackson and St. Joe, respectively.

MARP's first meeting for 2012 will be in Williamston in the historic depot. See you there and have a great holiday season!

TENTATIVE MEMBERS MEETING SCHEDULE – 2012

(Meetings begin at 10 a.m.)

January 14 – Williamston Depot Museum, 369 W. Grand River, Williamston

February 11 – former GR&I depot (now known as the Arcus Depot), 402 E Michigan Ave, Kalamazoo

March 10 or 17 – new Pontiac Amtrak & Greyhound station, 51000 Woodward Ave., Pontiac

April 21 – Chelsea Area Historical Society Museum, 125 Jackson Road, Chelsea

May -- National Train Day activities pre-empt monthly meeting

June 16 – Muskegon Railroad Historical Depot, 610 Western Ave., Muskegon

July 28 – Grand Rapids, Grand Rails 2012-77th Annual NMRA National Convention, the Rapid Central Station, 2nd Floor Conference Center, Barlett Street SW, Grand Rapids

Check www.marp.org for additions and changes to this schedule.

The Chairman's Corner – what am I doing

Welcome to Larry Sobczak, the new editor of the Michigan Passenger. Larry is polishing off his journalism degree to help put out our quarterly newsletter. However, Larry is not new to our Association, as he will also continue to carry on as our Webmaster. Good luck to you Larry.

My thanks go out to J.R.Valderas. J.R. was our former Editor; it seems he got overwhelmed with reporting duties with the schools in the Holland, Michigan area and is not able to keep up with the pace of The Michigan Passenger duties. Everybody I talked to agrees you did fantastic job and we really miss you. I know this simple thank you is not enough to show our appreciation.

And hello Michigan Passenger readers from me, the MARP Chairman. I am now starting the second year of my term. With my previous 12 years of non-profit experience, I am happy to report that I made it through MARP this past year relatively unscathed. Although I have to report that I got less accomplished then I intended (isn't that always the case). As I expected, I encountered plenty of first-year growing experiences. Over the years, I have learned to be patient, eventually everything turns out well.

Finally, I encourage you, our reader, to participate in some of our events. You can get a copy of our outreach report on Excel spreadsheet from me personally at RPTischbein@juno.com. I will email you the updated copy. Please feel free to show up at any of our events unannounced. Look us over; you may decide to get involved.

Robert Tischbein

RECORD:

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representative of a 40-year upward trend. Amtrak has set ridership records eight out of the last nine years. A decade ago, it carried 21 million passengers a year.

"Amtrak is fulfilling its national mission and is part of the solution to meet America's growing transportation and energy needs," Joseph Boardman, Amtrak's president and chief executive officer, said in a statement.

Nationwide ticket revenue for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30 reached nearly $1.9 billion which broke the record $1.7 billion set the prior year by 8 percent.

In Michigan, track work and freight slowdowns between Detroit and Chicago strongly impacted the Wolverine service and contributed to slower growth than anticipated, yet, all three Amtrak services experienced increases in ridership and revenue.

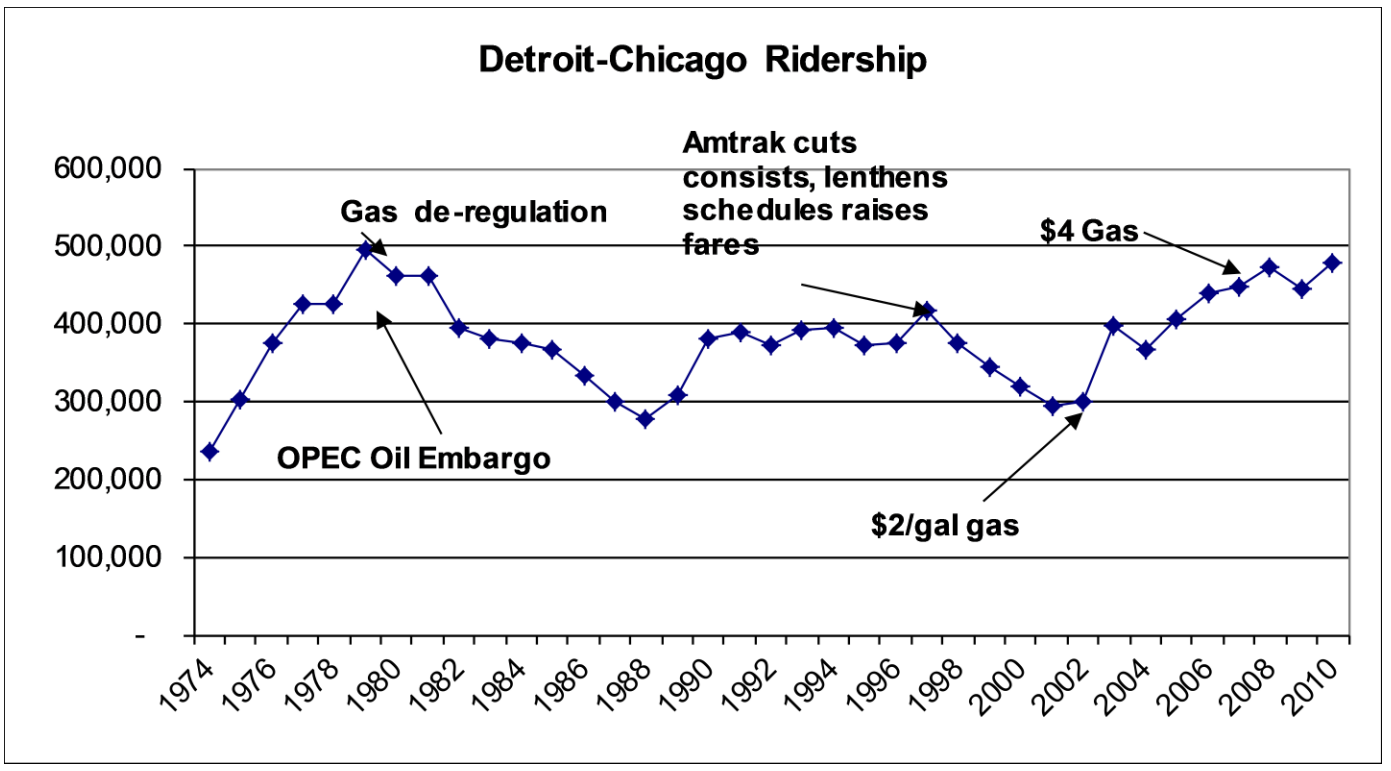
In figures for the 2010-2011 fiscal year, 503,290 passengers rode Amtrak Wolverine service trains on the Pontiac/Detroit-Chicago corridor, an increase of 4.9 percent from the same period a year ago. Ticket revenue was up by 11 percent to $18,769,770.

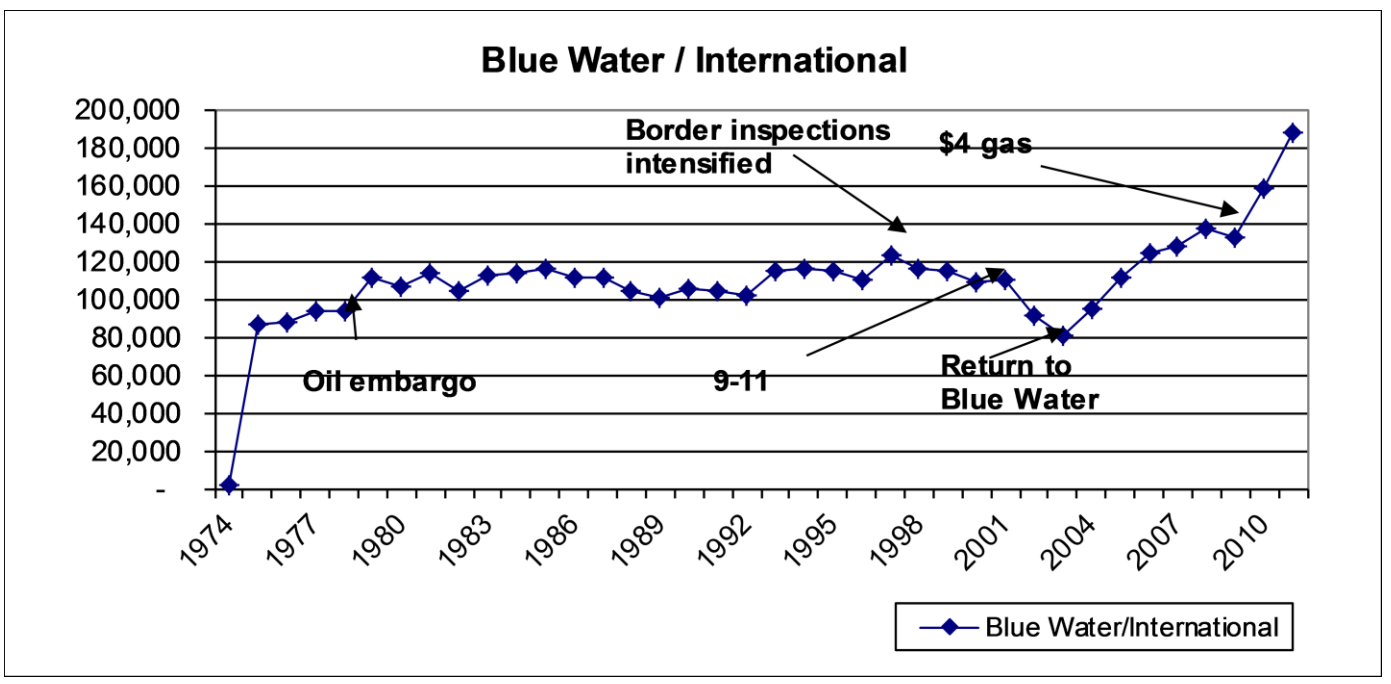
The Blue Water service on the Port Huron/East Lansing-Chicago route saw a 18.6 percent increase with 187,065 passengers using the Amtrak service in FY2011. Ticket revenue was up by 22.3 percent to $5,797,878.

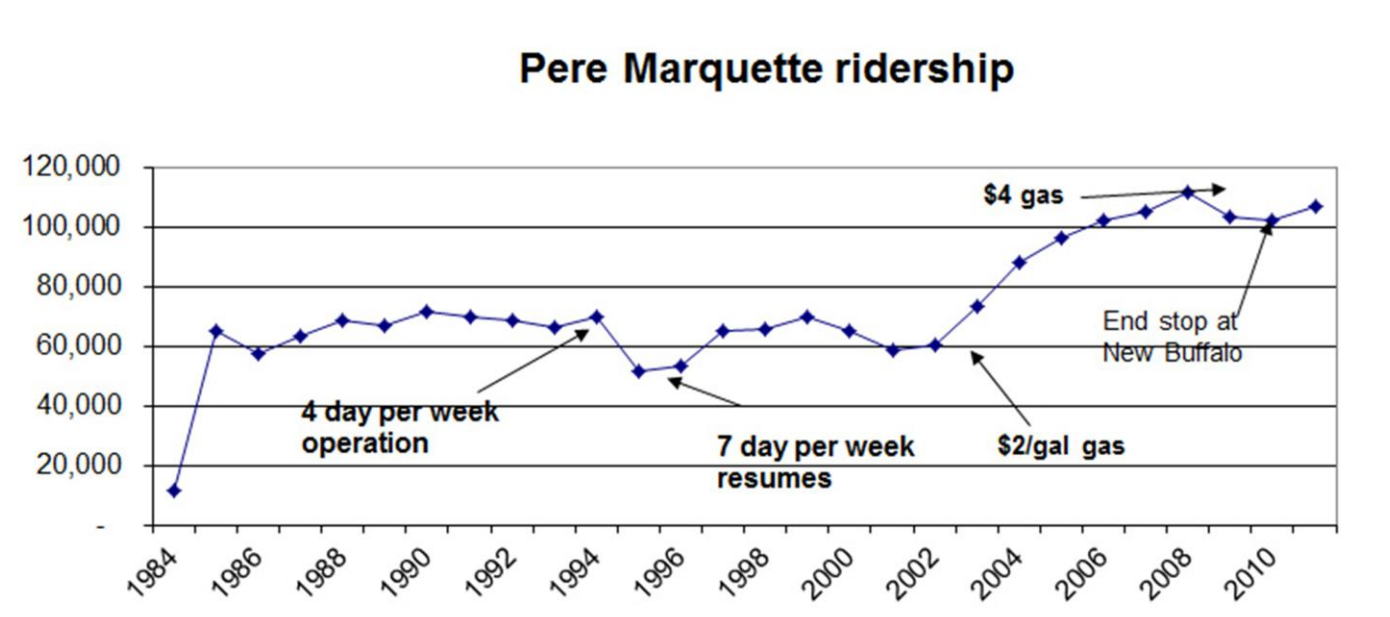
Ridership on the Pere Marquette service on the Grand Rapids-Chicago route experienced a gain of 4.7 percent with 106,662 passengers riding Amtrak, while ticket revenue rose 9.8 percent to $3,197,106.

"This past year marks the highest ridership totals ever on Amtrak services in Michigan," said State Transportation Director Kirk T. Steudle.

"All three lines, especially the Blue Water, have made great gains, despite the slowdowns on the Pontiac/Detroit-Chicago corridor," he said. "We've taken steps to repair the track between Kalamazoo and Ypsilanti, so that will help bring speeds back to what customers expect."







(Graphics by John DeLora)

Amtrak operates the Blue Water and Pere Marquette services under a contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). At this time, Amtrak does not receive any direct state support for the Wolverine service. Michigan is one of 15 states that provide state-supported service.

Five intercity bus routes show ridership growth

Intercity bus routes in Michigan have experienced significant ridership growth for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, and collected $1.8 million in ticket revenue according to the Michigan Department of Transportation.

In figures for the 2010-2011 fiscal year, the Straits service between East Lansing and St. Ignace saw a 27 percent increase with 17,166 passengers using the intercity bus service in FY 2011. Ticket revenue was up by 35.7 percent to $415,263.

The Huron service between Bay City and St. Ignace experienced an increase of 7,691 passengers, an increase of 17.1 percent from the same period a year ago. Ticket revenue was up by 22.8 percent to $202,868.

Due to a route change, ridership along the Sleeping Bear route between Grand Rapids and Boyne Falls experienced a loss of 9.9 percent with 16,283 passengers, while ticket revenue remained constant with FY 2010 levels at $343,269.

Upper Peninsula bus routes also experienced ridership growth at a similar rate.

The Superior route between Hancock and Milwaukee, Wis., saw a 20.6 percent increase in ridership along with a 20.6 increase in ticket revenue of $622,475.

The Hiawatha route between St. Ignace and Ironwood saw a 2.6 percent increase in ridership, while ticket revenue was up 16 percent to $220,863.

Indian Trails provides service for all five intercity bus routes under a contract with the Michigan Department of Transportation. Passenger revenues accounted for 50 percent of the operating expenses in FY 2011, making intercity bus service the most efficient form of public transportation in Michigan.

FUNDING:

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Parks Transit Center, through downtown and north to the State Fairgrounds. Suburban leaders hope to extend the line north to Maple Road in Birmingham.

The Obama Administration has been a key supporter of Detroit's effort to build a light rail line to focus reinvestment along Woodward and ultimately help modernize and stabilize the city's transit service.

Levin hopes the promise of significant federal help for rail – may finally force cooperation on a regional transit system that has eluded the region for decades.

Currently the Detroit People Mover, the Detroit Department of Transportation bus service and the suburban SMART bus services are in states of distress. Advocates say a unified agency could solve problems.

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF AMTRAK. A special exhibit train visited Jackson Oct. 8 and 9 to celebrate the nation's passenger railroad's four decades of existence. Hundreds toured the passenger cars which were converted into a museum showing uniforms, advertising and other artifacts. (Photo by Larry Sobczak)

Next step for Detroit-Chicago speed enhancement: Environmental study

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is requesting bids for the Chicago-Detroit rail corridor investment plan and environment study.

The request was issued in partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation, Indiana Department of Transportation and Norfolk Southern Railway. Interested bidders can submit their proposals by Dec. 11.

The project involves construction of a 304-mile corridor between Chicago and Detroit / Pontiac, which will be a part of the Chicago Hub Network.

MDOT announced in October an agreement with Norfolk Southern Railway (NSR) to purchase a 135-mile segment of railroad track between Kalamazoo and Dearborn. The track is part of Amtrak's Wolverine passenger rail service and also provides freight services to major Michigan companies, including Ford Motor Co. The $140 million purchase was made using Federal Railroad Administration grant funds and a state match funded approved by the state legislature in September.

MDOT has been working in cooperation with the FRA and Amtrak in planning for implementation of 110 mph passenger service over this route. The FRA had awarded approximately $350 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grants and High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program grants to MDOT for the acquisition and upgrade of the line.

Improvements to the rail line are expected to reduce passenger train travel times between Dearborn and Kalamazoo by a half an hour. Current Amtrak schedules list travel times between the two cities at approximately two and a half hours.

In addition to the purchase and upgrades, MDOT agreed to build a double track on the busiest freight segment of the line east of Ypsilanti to ensure adequate capacity for both freight and passenger operations. The new track will benefit the production operations of Ford Motor Co., among others.

"We believe this investment in intercity passenger rail will reduce travel times, improve service reliability and allow for future increases in services, which will increase ridership and revenue," said Timothy Hoeffner, administrator, MDOT Office of Rail.

MDOT plans to stabilize and upgrade the track for both passenger and rail freight services. NSR will retain an exclusive freight easement to preserve and grow its freight business.

"It will set the stage for additional passenger rail service after the completion of the accelerated rail project. And, because NSR retains the freight business, Michigan has a nationally recognized Class 1 operator willing to grow and enhance freight business, which is critical to Michigan's economic growth," Hoeffner said.

MDOT ownership of the Kalamazoo-Dearborn segment, combined with Amtrak ownership between Kalamazoo-Porter, Ind., will ensure that nearly 80 percent of the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac Accelerated Rail Corridor will be in passenger-friendly ownership, giving greater control over the services.

Amtrak will take over train dispatch operations along the line between Dearborn and Porter which should lead to less passenger train delays caused by freight trains according to MDOT officials.

Visit **www.marp.org** for news updates and current Amtrak train status in Michigan.